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MOZARABIC ART IN ANDALUCIA

THE art of the Andalucian Mozarabs¹ seems to have received as yet little attention from students of the Mohammedan occupation of Spain, although much has been written about the Mozarabs of Toledo. I hope, therefore, that some observations on the beautiful sculptures and mural paintings of these mediaeval Spanish Christians may be of interest.

Eighteen years study of the subject has left me with the conviction that this art was not implanted by invaders from the East, whether Greek, Roman, or Arab, but is in its essence traditional to the soil, and handed down from so remote a period that it would be rash to attempt to date it, although of course influenced from generation to generation by the political changes which took place in Spain. One must go to country villages, lonely manors, and granges among the mountains remote from cities if one desires to form a just idea of the astonishing persistence of tradition among the native Andalucians, who are as different in many characteristics from the practical Basques or Catalans as from the *laissez-faire* aristocrats of proud Castile. In the fertile vegas and precipitous sierras of the Southwest the true Iberian race, as apart from the Celt-Iberian, survives with habits and customs in some respects hardly changed since before the time of Christ. They produce corn, oil, and white wine in certain districts as did their forefathers under Carthage or Rome or their own King Arganthonius² in the sixth century B.C.; and certain details of the advanced agricultural science of the ancient Tartessus have been handed down in such perfection that travellers conversant with *e.g.* olive culture elsewhere have told me no other system excels the traditional Andalucian, the origin of which is lost in the mists of antiquity.

The same must be said of the irrigation systems generally attributed to the Moslem influence in Spain. I have found no

¹ *Moçtereb* was a Christian who lived among the Arabs and was on friendly terms with them. Cf. *Diccionario de la Academia de la Lengua española*.

² Herodotus, I, 163 ff.

fewer than four examples of proto-historic, or Bronze Age, or megalithic hydraulic works, easily recognizable by the cutting and placing of the stones. Three of these conduits still convey drinking water from headlands miles away to towns the "Cyclopean" foundations of which I have seen in the course of excavations undertaken for scientific or other purposes. That these remarkable works were not inspired by Rome is proved by the glaring contrast of the Roman repairs with the rough-hewn stones employed in the parent conduits, most of which lie at least four meters below the present level of the soil. And we have the authority of Strabo¹ for the high civilization of the Turdetanians (the name given to the Tartessians after their conquest by Carthage in or about the fifth century B.C.) in his time.

As another instance of the survival of tradition we have the proto-historic method of construction commented on by Caesar, known to the Arabs as *tapia*, and in the present day as *terre pisée*. I am writing this essay in a modern house built of *tapia*, i.e. damp earth trodden between boards, and it is attached to a great fortress tower also built of *tapia*, with walls two meters thick and foundations of stones rough-cut in the Cyclopean style. This tower has Roman arches 7 meters high within, and Arabic horseshoe arches outside, of stone ingenuously and visibly dove-tailed into the Roman facing; and at the back of an Arabic arcature still more ingenuously introduced above the horseshoe arch on the existing façade. We have the original Iberian façade of earth stamped between boards and rubbed smooth on the surface by way of ornament. Where some of the Roman work has fallen away we see the holes where the proto-historic scaffold poles were fixed before Phoenicians or Carthaginians came to destroy, so far as in them lay, the proto-historic or Mediterranean civilization of Tartessus.

The tower is one of the five gate-towers of the ancient fortified city of Niebla, the Liblah of the Arab historians and the *Ilipla*² of the classics, and local tradition carries the history of this, the main gate, and the city back to the destruction of Tartessus at the hands of Carthage. Certain it is that the town existed when the Sun was the deity of Tartessus, for each one of these gates opens

¹ Strabo, III, 146 ff.

² Strabo, III, 141 ff., Polybius, XI, 20, Livy, XXXV, 1, and Pliny, *N.H.* III, 1, 3, read, apparently, *Ilipa*, not *Ilipla*. Pliny, *loc. cit.*, mentions another town, *Ilipula*. H. N. F.

at right angles to the great fortress wall—which still completely encircles the town—and has its outlet facing the rising sun.

These earthen walls, of which whole villages, including even edifices of some importance, are still constantly constructed, become extraordinarily hard in a short time under the burning Andalusian sun, while the proto-historic remains such as those of Niebla, and Seville also, are indestructible by any means short of dynamite. I had a skilled stonecutter at work a whole month opening a window in the wall of my tower, which when it came into my possession had no light and no ventilation. Both the great archways leading one into and the other out of the town had been built up by the peasant families who had lived in its shelter for hundreds of years, leaving only a small door to obtain access. In the middle of the wall we found, near the remains of some of the wooden pegs and a cord of esparto grass used to support the boards which confined the earth, a section of a very early flat-bottomed plate with a sun symbol traced on it in metallic lustre—material evidence of the height of civilization attained by the primitive inhabitants of Andalusia.

The construction of the fortress walls of Seville—now regarded as built over the remains of the lost city of Tharsis—is precisely similar to that of Niebla. These walls and the Alcazar, the palace of the rulers of Spain throughout history, are built of beaten earth on foundations of Cyclopean work five meters deep, and parts of the actual palace walls are no less than five meters thick. Behind the Renaissance façade of the garden front of the magnificent hall known as the Salon of the Emperor Charles V., because it was redecorated for his wedding, a stretch of the Arabic façade has been found, and behind this again General Tavira, Governor of the Palace, has discovered quite recently the primitive stone front of the original building with Iberian signs, doubtless mason's marks, on several of the stones. Very little of the original building is now visible, for the walls naturally have been faced again and again in the course of so many centuries; but in the palace gardens may yet be seen the remains of a massive tower in its primitive condition, and in the beaten earth of which it is constructed bits of Stone Age pottery have been discovered. The true history of the Alcazar of Seville will only be written when the extensive investigations set on foot by King Alfonso and superintended with keen interest by General Tavira reach the vast extent of subterranean chambers and galleries yet to be

opened up beneath the Arabic palace which was built by Motamid-ibn-Abbad in the eleventh century on what then remained of the five-meter thick outer walls overlooking the junction of the Guadalquivir and the Guadaira. Then we may hope to learn more about the proto-historic or Mediterranean civilization of the Iberian race, which has preserved, together with its irrigation systems, its methods of construction, and the details of its agricultural science, the tradition of its sacerdotal garments and the racial type of its women in a series of sculptures and paintings unique in Christian art.

Although the Southwest of Spain was cut off from the march of northern Romanic art down to the reconquest in the thirteenth century, it is a mistake to suppose that religious art here developed solely along Mohammedan lines. In *Arabic Spain* (Chapter I, 'Christianity under Islam') evidence of unimpeachable authority will be found that Andalusia always had a Christian art of her own, nurtured and developed by thousands of Andalusian Christians (Mozarabs) who lived here and practised their religion

right down to the coming of the Almohades, or Moors of Morocco, as distinct from the Arabs from the East, in the second half of the twelfth century. So powerful was the Christian element in all this region that the Christians were able to retain their own rite, their churches and their priests, until the reconquest in 1248, even the bishops having held their sees in many cases until close to that event. Curious relics of the ancient Isidorian or Hispalian (Mozarabic) rite persist to this day in the Cathedral services at Seville, to the bewilderment of Catholics from other countries.¹

¹ Cf. *Glorias Sevillanas*, by Don Manuel Serrano y Ortega.



FIGURE 1.—OUR LADY OF CARMEL:
SEVILLE.

To convince ourselves whence sprang the art of these Andalusian Christians, true to their faith through so many centuries of



FIGURE 2.—THE “LADY OF ELCHE”
RECONSTRUCTED BY DON JOSE PIZJOAN.

(By permission from the *Burlington Magazine*,
November, 1912.)

alien pressure, we need only compare the sculptured Virgin of Carmel (Fig. 1) with the “Lady of Elche” (Fig. 2). The general cast of the countenance, the peculiarly stately poise of the head, and the beautiful shape of the oval heavy-lidded eyes, proclaim the survival of a racial type.

The alabaster image of Our Lady of Carmel was found, together with a church bell, in digging for the foundations of a new convent for the Carmelite nuns of Seville in 1414 or 1415.¹ On the secularization of this convent in the last century, the image was given into the charge of the Hieronymites of Buena Vista, on the bank of the Guadalquivir a mile out of the city, and when this monastery in its turn suffered the same fate, the exquisite statue was taken to the church of San Lorenzo, together with two sets of embroidered vestments of the fifteenth century. At San Lorenzo I had the good fortune to see it before it was placed on the altar where it now stands. Thus I was able to make a detailed study of

the dress (now, alas, hidden under heavy draperies of velvet and satin, according to the religious mode in Seville today), although I could not get the modern crowns and adjuncts removed.

¹ Zuñiga, *Anales de Sevilla*, Lib. X.

The classical costume with the *chlamys* is seen in the photograph, but not so the typical *casulla monastica*. This is of the form worn by the early Christians, which did not begin to vary, according to Sr. Gudioll y Cunill (*Nocions d'arqueologia sagrada catalana*) until the twelfth century. It is safe to say that racial tradition prevailed where so primitive a form of the vestment was represented. For my part, from internal evidence too long to give in detail here, I take this work of art to have been executed somewhere towards the third quarter of the eleventh century, when all the Mozarabic churches in Seville obtained support and were renovated, thanks to the influence of the Christian wife of King Motamid-ibn-Abbad, whose daughter married King Alfonso VI of Castile. In this image the chasuble consists of one piece only, and that is worn at the back. The hair, eyebrows, and eyes are painted, as are also the lips. This detail is seen in most, if not all, of the Mozarabic images of Andalucia.

A small alabaster image of the Virgin (Fig. 3) found at Niebla in the province of Huelva in 1912 has many of the same features as that of Carmel, not excepting the *casulla monastica*, but it has in addition an outline which is individual and of considerable interest. The strangely rotund shape of the body and the wide outflow of the skirt at the foot bear some resemblance to the well-known Hera of Samos in the Louvre. The shapelessness of the Niebla figure cannot be ascribed to ineptitude on the part of the artist, for the head has the same dignified poise and beautiful cast of features as the "Lady of Elche" and the Virgin of Carmel, while the floral decoration of the pedestal is highly artistic. Thus I take the rotund outline to be the survival of another racial tradition.

Tartessus (now Andalucia) was in close alliance with the Samians, as also the Phocaeans and Rhodians, in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., temples to Hera, Artemis-Athene, and, later, Diana having been erected in many places in the region.¹ There are relics of a Graeco-Tartessian temple at Niebla, steps and the base of a column cut in the rock still existing outside the town walls, while the base of a Doric column 63 centimeters in diameter found within the town suggest that the temple was of importance.

The statue of an Iberian or Tartessian priestess in the Archaeological Museum of Madrid (Fig. 4), from which Sr. Pizjoan reconstructed the "Lady of Elche" from the waist down, has the

¹ Cf. Joaquín Costa, *Estudios Ibericos*, pp. 40 ff.

same peculiar outflow of the drapery at the foot. It may be that in the singular outline of the Niebla statuette we have a reminiscence not only of early Greek art as seen in the Samian Hera, but also of the frills and plaited flounces seen at the bottom of the skirt of many of the statuettes of Iberian priestesses.

The tradition of the *chlamys* also appears in the Niebla image, but half concealed by the wide, thick sleeves and disfigured by



FIGURE 3.—ALABASTER IMAGE OF THE VIRGIN: NIEBLA.¹

holes made to support the image of the Child, which unfortunately was not discovered with the Mother.

Another singularly interesting and suggestive survival of the proto-historic sacerdotal dress is seen in the Mozarabic mural

¹ Found at Niebla, in the Province of Huelva, in 1913 and preserved in the museum of the Anglo-Spanish School of Archaeology. This shows the *casulla monastica* as worn also by "Our Lady of Carmel." The eyes are wide apart; the mouth slightly open and smiling; the nose long and springing from between the eyebrows, as in the "Lady of Elche."

painting of Nuestra Señora de la Antigua ("Our Lady of the Old Time") (Fig. 5) in the Cathedral of Seville. The "Lady of Elche," as also several of the statuettes of priestesses in Madrid, wears a long and voluminous cloak which when opened out would form a complete circle. The Marques de Cerralbo, President of the Madrid Junta Superior de Excavaciones tells me that this Iberian or Tartessian cloak was the parent of the sacerdotal cope, the cloak worn by priests in the street, and the cape considered typical of the Spanish *caballero*. The Tartessian priestesses wear it drawn closely round the figure and falling in rich folds over the arm from the elbow to the hem of the skirt. Just such a cloak is worn by "Our Lady of the Old Time," draped over the arms and from thence downward over the skirt, in wide, stiff folds which seem modelled on those of the priestesses. The dress flows out over the feet in small curves or plaits, another suggestion of tradition.

¹ Found at El Cerro de los Santos, Province of Andalucía, now in the Archaeological Museum, Madrid. It shows the characteristic draping of the round cloak, with the spreading of the skirts over the feet.

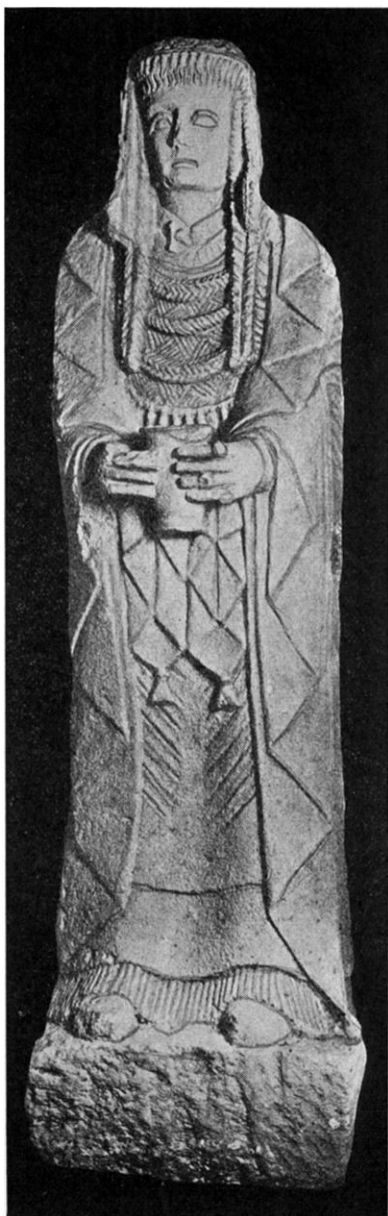


FIGURE 4.—IBERIAN PRIESTESS:
MADRID.¹



FIGURE 5.—NUESTRA SEÑORA DE LA ANTIGUA: SEVILLE.¹

This remarkable mural painting existed in a chapel of the Cathedral which was served by faithful Mozarabic priests during the last years of the Almohade rule in Seville, and no one knows how long before. When Fernando III (Saint Fernando) conquered the city in 1248 these priests were dwelling in a cloister of the primitive basilica, which had never been rebuilt since it was founded, though the whole building, with the sole exception of the Chapel of "Our Lady of the Old Time," had been converted to Moslem uses at the end of the twelfth century. The cloister, which is entered by a remarkable archway of tenth century construction, still serves as the residence of canons and the celebrated Seises, whose famous dance dates at least from the reconquest and probably from long before that time. The thirteenth century *Cantigas* of Alfonso the Wise relate how Saint Fernando visited

¹ This is a mural painting in the chapel of its advocacy in the Cathedral of Seville. The image which is about eight feet high is referred to as "Nuestra Señora de la Antigua" in the *Cantigas* of Alfonso the Wise (thirteenth century) and

from the resemblance of the design of the robe to a Spanish-Arabic textile of that period in which cherubs holding a crown are depicted, it may be inferred that the already ancient painting was renovated according to the artistic taste of the time after the reconquest of Seville in 1248.

secretly this picture of Our Lady during the siege, as also how her refulgent beauty so dazzled the infidels who beheld it that not one could ever raise a hand to injure the picture. It remained in its original place, on the wall facing south in the ancient chapel of its advocacy, until 1578. The chapel had then been rebuilt and the painting was transferred with infinite care to the altar which it now adorns, amid the rejoicing of the city. Every year at daybreak on Easter morning a magnificent high mass is sung in the chapel in honor of "Our Lady of the Old Times," and is attended by the whole chapter in full canonicals, but as people are mostly asleep at that hour, few Sevillians or foreign visitors now share in this act of homage to the symbol of a faith which never wavered through five hundred years of alien occupation.

"Our Lady of the Old Time" was patroness of a very ancient order of chivalry which had as its device a jar of lilies or lotus flowers, the Spanish *azucena*, the Arabic *açuçena*, and the Egyptian *sechen-n-aten* (bunch of *aten* flowers). This order was known in the fifteenth century as that of the *Jarra* (vase). The heraldic arms of the order of Nuestra Señora de la Antigua are also those of the Cathedral of Seville, which is dedicated to Maria Santissima—"Our Lady Most Holy." And an ancient almost forgotten Andalucian tradition gives the vase of *azucenas* as the heraldic arms of the Blessed Virgin herself, on the ground that the woman who ate of the root of the water-lily would conceive without human intervention, a mystical idea which may have come to Spain



FIGURE 6.—OUR LADY OF ROCAMADOR:
SEVILLE.



FIGURE 7.—IBERIAN PRIESTESS:
MADRID.¹

from Egypt with the Coptic adherents of the Arabs in the eighth century.²

The period of the painting of "Our Lady of the Old Time" has been hotly disputed. Successive "restorations" have increased the difficulty of classifying it with any certainty from the technical point of view as the work of this or that century. We may, however, assume that the original image must have been painted previous to the Almo-hade invasion in 1146, when such persecution of the Christians as ever took place in Seville would have been at its height, since it was the object of worship and was regarded as miraculous when the Moors were driven out in 1248. It is certain that the chapel and its cult would not have been tolerated during that century had it not existed previously, while if a new presentment of the worshipped image had been painted after the reconquest the Christian chroniclers would not have failed to give it prominence.³

¹ In addition to the headdress similar to that of "Our Lady of the Corral," this figure shows the typical circular mantle and flounced skirt.

² Mr. Albert Van der Put, in the *Burlington Magazine* of August 1913 gives the portrait of a Knight of the *Jarra*, but does not explain that this was the principal Aragonese order of the fifteenth century. Variants of the vase of the Virgin (*la Jarra de la Virgen*) are repeated *ad infinitum* in Andalucian art in all its branches, and it pervades the whole Cathedral of Seville, especially in its unsurpassable ironwork, and its magnificent vestments which are comparable only to those of St. Peter's at Rome.

³ The traditional cloak with its heavy folds draped over the elbow is seen also

"Our Lady of Rocamador" (Fig. 6) is a mural painting of the same dimensions as "Our Lady of the Old Time" and also has the thirteenth century cherubs holding the crown, although they do not appear in the illustration. Its history resembles that of the image in the Cathedral: it was painted at a period unknown for a "Hermitage and Hospice of the poor" and appears to have been given the (then new) advocacy of Rocamador in or about 1252. The Hospice was then pulled down and the painting transferred to its present position on a wall under the Arabic minaret of the Church of San Lorenzo when that edifice, which had been used as a mosque, was reconverted to Christian uses. The records, however, are less clear than those of "Our Lady of the Old Time."

Another Mozarabic representation of the Virgin is the mural painting of "Our Lady of the Corral" in the Church of Saint Isidore in Seville. So far it has been impossible to obtain a photograph of this, for it is glazed and the light is extremely bad at all times. Here, again, we have the heavy-lidded almond eyes and the finely chiselled lips typical of the race as seen in these presentments, but the picture as a whole is unlike any of the others, save as being much larger than life. The most interesting feature from the point of view of this study is the headdress. At the first glance it looks quite Egyptian, but when one climbs up a ladder with a candle to see it close at hand, it proves to be a drapery with straight folds hanging below the ears and adorned with heavy fringes and plaits of gold almost exactly like those seen in the statues of the Iberian priestess (Fig. 7). Such a detail can hardly be other than traditional; it cannot well be attributed to mere coincidence.

Here, then, are a few Mozarabic presentments of the Virgin existing in Andalucia. To describe all I have seen would need far too much space. If a systematic examination were made of the mediaeval statues and paintings in small towns and villages off the beaten track, material would be obtained for a volume which would throw a blaze of light on the traditional art of the Christians of Andalucia under Islam.

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in a tenth century manuscript. I think the *Codice Albeldense*, but I am quoting from memory. As will be seen, the arrangement of the drapery is too characteristic to be overlooked wherever one may meet with it.